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PLYMPTON
IN THE OLDEN TIME.

BY

JAMES HINE, F.R.I.B.A.

REPRINTED FROM THE ANNUAL REPORT AND TRANSACTIONS OF THE PLYMOUTH
INSTITUTION AND DEVON AND CORNWALL NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY,

1866-7.

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ISAIAH W. N. KEYS, 52, BEDFORD STREET.

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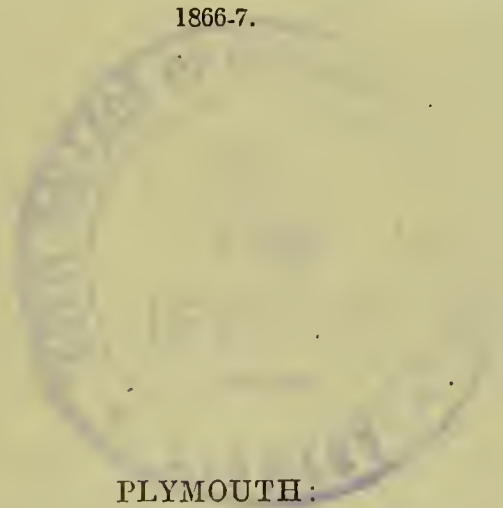
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ANY interest attaching to Plympton belongs to the olden time. Of many other places it may be said that the new has entirely supplanted the old. Modern business requirements, new warehouses, and thoroughfares, have had the effect of stamping out all vestiges of the past, and even the traditions of them. An unpretending Railway Station, and a dozen or more new houses have not had this effect at Plympton. The town has no novelties to shew us; the lions are just what they were 200 years ago.

Plympton in the olden time had its castle and its priory, its two churches, and later its Guildhall and Grammar School. Not quite in the olden time, but only just on the verge of our prosaic modern time, Plympton gave to the world England's greatest painter,—a circumstance which (though forgotten by the native, who on being asked by a tourist where Sir Joshua Reynolds was born, replied he "never heeard of sich") should indeed make this honoured little town almost as famous as Stratford-on-Avon.

In the Domesday Book, Plympton is designated "Terra Regis," so also are Tavistock, Ashburton, and Tiverton, "all which places were then the King's demesne towns," but not boroughs.

A date anterior to the Norman Conquest has been ascribed to the castle, on the ground of its similarity to Trematon, Launceston, and Restormel castles, which Borlase and Grose assert to have been built before the year 900. The antiquaries, however, of the last century are often extremely inaccurate in their classification both of military and ecclesiastical structures. S. Germans Church, the ancient cathedral of Cornwall, is designated Saxon by them,

whereas its features, as any tyro will now see, are undoubted Norman; in fact, there are no remains of Saxon architecture in Cornwall, and it would be surprising if there were, seeing that the Saxons never had any permanent hold on this part of Britain; for, though Egbert is said to have reduced the Cornish Britons to "nominal subjection" about the year 810, we find that Athelstan as late as 936 was in conflict with the British forces and drove them across the Tamar, and not until that year had Exeter been subjected to his government.

Restormel Castle is undoubtedly of Norman construction, and it is probable that the most ancient portions of Launceston Castle are nearly two centuries later than the date ascribed by Borlase.

Although, therefore, from the naturally strong position of all these castles, it is probable that the Britons occupied these positions for defence, no visible remains can be considered as anterior to the Norman Conquest. In the absence of any architectural details at Plympton Castle,—the masonry in the walls being somewhat analagous to the British masonry found in different parts of Cornwall,—there may be more room for doubt and conjecture here than in respect to the other castles; yet the rudeness of the masonry may be accounted for by supposing that only the vassal inhabitants of the neighbourhood were employed in the works, under Norman architects and overseers.

The vestiges of Norman rule are clearly traceable in the county and borders of Devon. The same independent character which Exeter maintained against the Saxon authority, that city endeavoured to assert against the Conqueror; and the obedience of the western capital required to be insured by a number of castles, of a date not long subsequent to the Conquest. The castles of Barnstaple, Exeter, Totnes, Plympton, and Trematon guarded the rivers which gave access to the interior of the county; and the fortresses of Okehampton, Launceston, Lidford, Berry, and Tiverton, the inland passes. Of the castles enumerated here, Berry at least has been entirely rebuilt at a later period.



A SEAL OF THE LORDS OF PLYMPTON CASTLE
ATTACHED TO A DEED DATED 15. JAMES I.



THE SEAL OF THE CORPORATION OF PLYMPTON

J E Wood Sc

Plympton Castle was the chief residence of the Earls of Devon and Lords of Plympton. King Henry, the youngest son of the Conqueror, in the first year of his reign, granted the Lordship to Richard de Redvers or Rivers and his posterity, to enjoy also the title and possessions belonging to the Devonshire Earldom. The said Richard was one of William the Conqueror's generals in the battle of Hastings, and obtained the barony of Okehampton from William Rufus. He was one of the chief councillors of Henry the First, and was so highly esteemed by him that he was created first Earl of Devon since the Conquest. The castle stood on the north side of the town, occupying a space of about two acres, extending 700 feet from east to west, including the ditch, and 400 feet from north to south. Leland says of this structure, in his Itinerary, "On the side of the town is a fair large castelle and dungeon in it, whereof the walls yet stand, though the lodgings be clean decayed." At present there only remains a portion of the circular keep or tower, 50 feet in diameter, on a mound about 60 feet high. The ruined walls average 14 feet in height and are 9 feet thick, grouted with mortar or concrete as hard as the stones themselves. Around the keep in the thickness of the wall is a plastered flue 15 in. by 10 in., the purpose of which is not obvious. It has been suggested that it was designed for the conveyance of sound. It seems more probable that it was for ventilation. There is a similar flue at Rochester Castle. The habitable portions of Plympton Castle must have been of considerable extent. These, including the state apartments, and lodgings (as Leland calls them) for the military and retainers, were within the outer castle walls, and built around a spacious basse-court. The ballium wall—embattled and flanked with towers—was raised on a platform about 30 feet above the fosse or ditch, in the position now indicated by a modern path, and by a belt of trees planted about 100 years ago. The basse-court has long been a quiet village green, and the site of the

ballium wall, where stern warriors peered over frowning battlements, is now a "lovers' walk." Such are the tendencies of modern civilization. Surrounding the castle wall was a deep moat about 40 feet wide, still to be traced, except on the eastern side, where it has been filled up. In Leland's time it was full of water, and stored with carp. There are no remains whatever of the great gateway of the castle (with its drawbridge and portcullis), which, as shewn by the seal of the Lords of Plympton, was on the north side. There were probably towers at the different angles.

In the time of Baldwin de Rivers, second Earl of Devon and Lord of Plympton, the castle was the scene of events which strikingly illustrate the then unsettled state of the country, and the insubordination of even the most privileged class. Baldwin de Rivers was considered one of the richest and bravest men of the age ; but having with some other nobles rebelled against King Stephen, on account it is said of the king refusing to confer certain honours on them, he fortified himself in his castle at Exeter, where he was besieged by the monarch ; and it appears that certain knights, to whom he had intrusted his castle of Plympton, being apprehensive of the Earl's danger, or alarmed about their own safety, treated for the surrender of Plympton ; and the king sent 200 men with a large body of archers from Exeter to Plympton, who unexpectedly appeared under the walls of the castle about daybreak, and, according to the chronicler, the fortress was then almost entirely destroyed.

The lands of the Earl, which extended far and wide round Plympton Castle, and said to have been abundantly stocked and well cultivated, were harried by the king's troops, who drove off to Exeter many thousands of sheep and oxen.* Baldwin was then dispossessed of all his honours, and banished the kingdom ; but afterwards siding with the Empress Matilda, in the civil wars

* Devonshire wool was already a valuable commodity, and was bought at that time, it is said, by Flemish merchants who frequented our Devonshire ports.

which ensued, he was restored to all his honours and possessions by Henry II. He died A.D. 1155, and was succeeded by his son Richard de Redvers.

Baldwin, the eighth Earl, was the last of the male Redvers or Rivers who held the barony of Plympton. His death, by poison, occurred in France in 1262, and the inheritance of the Earls of Devon and Lords of Plympton, descended to Isabella de Redvers, the wife of the Earl of Albermarle, who styled herself Countess of Devon. Their only issue was a daughter, Aveline, who married the Earl of Lancaster, and she dying in 1293, without issue, Hugh Lord Courtenay, next heir to Isabella, Countess of Devon, and lineally descended from John Courtenay, Lord of Okehampton, who married the daughter of Sir William de Redvers, became ninth earl.

The possession by the Courtenays during succeeding centuries of the Earldom of Devon and the Barony of Plympton, was marked by many interesting and even tragical incidents, but these have no very immediate connection with the subject of this paper.*

The barony of Plympton was subdivided in the reign of Queen Mary. In the beginning of the last century it was in the hands of three families. It is now invested in the Earl of Morley.

The castle (probably rebuilt after its partial demolition in the time of Baldwin de Rivers, second Earl) does not appear to have been much molested between the reigns of Stephen and Charles the First; at least, we have no record of any memorable event during that long interval.

At the beginning of the civil war, Plympton was the headquarters of the force which the royalists then had in the county.

* One remarkable circumstance—mentioned by Pole—concerning Henry Courtenay, created Earl in 1525, may be noted. "This Henry," says Pole, "was soe intimate unto King Henry the 8th, that having no issue he intended to have made hym his successor unto the crown; but afterwards he fell into high displeasure of the King, so, as being questioned with divers others for ayding of Cardinale Poole, and intencion for the raising of forces on the Pope's behalf, he was arraigned, convicted, and executed for treason."

It was one of the principal quarters of Prince Maurice's army whilst besieging Plymouth, from October, 1642, to January, 1643. The King had a garrison here, which however was taken by the Earl of Essex, in the month of July, 1644. The castle at this period was mounted with eight pieces of ordnance.

The fertile valley of the Plym was often a tempting field for plunder to the Plymouth parliamentary troops, as it had been to the archers of King Stephen five centuries before. Its rich pasturage and produce induced a fraternity of pious monks at a very early period to settle here; which brings me to speak of the once famous priory of Plympton, the richest and most flourishing in Devon.

The first monastery or college existing here is said to have been founded by one of the Saxon kings, possibly Ethelwolf, who had a palace, so tradition informs us, at Yealmpton, about four miles distant. This establishment, however, early came to grief. "The glory of this towne (Plymptoun Marie)," says Leland, "stoode by the priorie of blake chanons, there buildid and richely endowid with landes.

"The original beginning of this priorie was after this fascion: one William Warwist, bisshop of Excester, displeased with the chanons or prebendaries of a fre chapelle of the fundation of the Saxon kinges, because they wold not leve theyr concubines, found meanes to dissolve their college, wherin was a deane or provost, and four prebendaries, with other ministers.

"The prebende of Plympton self was the title of one, and the prebend of S. Peter and Paule at Sultown, now caullid Plymouth, another. Bisshop Warwist, to recompence the prebendaries of Plymton, erectid a college of as many as wer ther at Bosenham in Southsax, and annexid the gift of them to his successors, bisshops of Excester. Then he set up at Plympton a priorie of canons regular, and after was ther buried in the chapitre house.

"Diverse noble men gave after landes to this priorie, emong

whom was Walterus de Valletorta, lord of Tremerton, in Cornewal, and, as sum say, of Totenes, who gave onto Plymtown priorie the isle of S. Nicolas cum cuniculis, conteyning a two acres of ground, or more, and lying at the mouthes of Tamar and Plym ryvers.

“There were buried sum of Courteneis and diverse other gentilmen in the chirch of the priorie of Plymtoun.”

The second establishment, then,—dedicated to the Virgin Mary and SS. Peter and Paul,—of the order of S. Augustine, was founded in 1121 by William Warelwast, Bishop of Exeter, the nephew and chaplain of William the Conqueror. He was one of the most gifted and energetic ecclesiastics of his day, and to him we are indebted for the earliest existing portions of Exeter Cathedral, including the two noble Norman towers. He seems to have set his heart on making Plympton priory the richest and most important in this part of the kingdom, and conveyed to it very large properties in Exeter. Many noblemen followed his example.

The rental of the priory shows that certain lands and rents were attached to the several conventual offices of almoner, precentor, cellarer, and chaplain of the infirmary.

Some idea of the wealth of the monastery may be gathered from the fact, that at the dissolution it was rated at £912. 12s. 8d. per annum, whereas the whole annual revenue of the 173 Augustine priories in the kingdom amounted to £33,027., the average being about one-fourth that of Plympton.

The founder, Bishop Warelwast, was buried here (as Leland says) in the chapter house of the priory, as were also the remains of his nephew, the fifth Bishop of Exeter. “Whoever is acquainted,” says Dr. Oliver, “with the deeds and writings of subsequent bishops, the immediate patrons of Plympton Priory, must have observed how closely they imitated the zeal of the founder, in watching and guarding its interests and promoting its welfare.” Amongst other privileges, the prior and convent possessed the right of appointing the rural dean of Plympton.

The venerable building had been destroyed before Leland's time, as is evident from his saying "the chirch that there a late stood," meaning, of course, the priory church.

"At present," says Dr. Oliver, "scarcely a vestige remains of any of the conventual buildings;" but in this respect, as we shall hereafter see, he is not quite correct.

Within one hundred and fifty years after the erection of the priory church, another sacred edifice was required for the growing population around; and Bishop Stapeldon, on Friday, October 29, 1311, consecrated one in honour of the Virgin Mary, for the use of the parishioners. The present chancel and north aisle of Plympton S. Mary Church, are portions of the church then dedicated,—the great body of the church, as we now see it, having been rebuilt in a later age and style. It was situate "*infra cemeterium prioratus*;" "and, as a mark of subjection, the parishioners were required to assist at divine service in the conventual church on the feast of its dedication, and to receive the blest palms there on Palm-Sunday, and walk in the solemn procession of that day. This obligation was sanctioned by Archbishop Courtenay, when he made a visitation of the diocese of Exeter in 1387, and confirmed by Pope Boniface IX. For some neglect of this ancient custom Bishop Lacy expressed his high displeasure, and enjoined its strict observance in the future."

In Plympton S. Mary parish there were several chapels, subject to the priory:—one at Newnham, another at Hemerdon, and a chapel attached to a lazar-house, of which there are now no remains. Sutton or South-town, now part of Plymouth, belonged to the priory of Plympton. "In the priors court there the portreve of the commonality was elected and sworne into office by his steward, and the markets, the instruments of punishment, and the assize of provisions belonged to him."

Those were not exactly the "furzy down" days of Plymouth; but it was quite an insignificant place at that time, compared with

its more wealthy neighbour, Plympton. Its great market in fact was Plympton. As Plymouth grew into more importance, as a naval as well as fishing station, and as the inhabitants became more influential, they naturally became anxious to obtain independence, and the right of self-government, with municipal privileges. Accordingly the inhabitants petitioned the king and parliament to be incorporated as early as 1412, and the answer to the petition was, "Let the petitioners compound with the lords having franchises before the next parliament, and report to them of their having made an agreement." As a matter of course, the prior and convent at first opposed their views, but when the inhabitants succeeded in 1439 in obtaining the royal licence and an act of parliament, which constituted them a corporation, under the title of the Mayor and Commonalty of the Borough of Plymouth, it was time for the prior and convent to come to terms with the reformers; and animated with an excellent feeling, they addressed a petition to Bishop Lacy, representing that it would be desirable to convey to this municipal body certain lands, tenements, franchises, fairs, markets, mills, and services, which they had possessed therein from time immemorial, and praying his consent to dispose of them. In January, 1440, as bishop and patron, he directed a commission to the archdeacon of Totnes to hold an inquisition, and to report to him the verdict of the jury. Accordingly a public inquisition was held in the nave of the priory church of Plympton, on the 7th of January, the gates of the monastery, and the doors of the church, being thrown wide open for all comers to enter. That was a memorable day for the young town; and no doubt many Plymouthians flocked to the priory, anxious to know the award. The jury being sworn, found that the premises of the priory, within Sutton-Prior, had in part been burnt by a hostile descent from Brittany;—that the yearly rental of the lands and tenements there was £8.,—of the courts, fairs, and markets 60s.,—and the clear profit from the mills something more

than £10. yearly;—that the offer by the mayor and corporation of the yearly fixed pension of £41. for the premises aforesaid was deemed by the prior and convent a satisfactory compensation, and that they were willing to accept the same; and the jury concurred in recommending such alienation and sale on such terms.

The parish church of S. Andrew, in Plymouth, continued an appendage to the priory nearly until the dissolution of the house. Its perpetual vicar, William de Wolley, became a professed religious at Plympton; and on his resigning this benefice, the prior and convent granted, November 23, 1334, to Bishop Grandisson the nomination of an incumbent, saving however their yearly pension of sixty marks. The bishop nominated Nicholas de Weyland, a canon of Plympton, December 23.

The chapel of S. Katherine on the How also belonged to the priory; but the following list of chapels appendant to this house will give some idea of the immense patronage which it enjoyed:—SS. Mary and Thomas, Plympton, Brixton, Wembury, Plymstock, Saundford-Spiney, Egg Buckland, Lanhorn (or Lanherne), Tamer-ton, Maristowe, Thrushelton, Uggeburgh, Exminster, Islington, Newton, Stoke-in-Teignhead, Blackhanton, Bratton, Meavy, S. Just, Petertavy, &c.; and the tithes of these places were appropriated to the priory for the promotion of hospitality and charity.

Two subordinate priories or cells depended on Plympton priory,—S. Mary de Marisco, commonly called Marsh Barton, in Alphington parish, and the cell of S. Anthony in the deanery of Powder, in Cornwall.

Most of the churches appendant to the Plympton priory have the parvise over the south porch, as at both the Plympton churches and at Ugborough. Here were probably deposited books written by the monks in their hours of study,—missals with rich borders, as well as writings of a more secular character; and possibly the preaching monks tarried in these chambers between the hours of divine service.

Dr. Oliver gives the names of thirty Priors of Plympton, from Ralph the first prior to John How, the last, who subscribed to the King's supremacy in 1534. During the administration of some of the priors, the hospitality of the establishment seems to have been unbounded. In consequence of the great confluence of the nobility and their retinues to the priory, the house became overcharged with debt, and Bishop Oldham, after his first visitation of the house, in 1505, authorized the prior, David Bercle,* to retire to a distant cell until a new system of economy could be arranged.

The refectory was by no means an unimportant portion of the priory. It and the cellar under (which was in charge of a much envied functionary, known as the cellarer) are the only considerable remains existing of the once extensive monastic buildings at Plympton. Here the monks, according to the seasons, had their one meal or two meals a day; the usual allowance being "one white loaf, another loaf called Trequarter, a dish called General, another dish of flesh or fish called Pitance, three potells of beer daily, or three silver half-pence" for the teetotalers. This is said to have been the ordinary bill of fare, but it was no doubt amplified to any extent, when the lords and squires were entertained by the prior, and especially when, as in 1348, Edward the Black Prince dined at his hospitable table.

But the time was coming when there would be "no more cakes and ale,"—when the prior and brethren would leave the

* There is a quaint letter extant of this hospitable prior, which Dr. Oliver gives. It is—"To his rev'ende broders in Criste, Maister Dene and Maister Chaunter, of Excester, or on' of theym, this to be delyvd. in goodely haste.

"Right rev'end broders in Criste, in my most lovyngc maner y recomaunde me unto yow p'yinge yow right hartely to be good maisters to a prieste called I. David Neyton, a lovyer of myn' which trustyth by your favors to be on' of your vicaryyes in Synte Peters Churche if he be a person' necessary to occupye a such rome yn your' sayde churche y p'y yow that he may the rader for my desyre be acceptc to the same rome, and he and y shall p'y for the longe contynuaunce of your bothe prosperyteis, which God p'sve to his pleasur' and your hartes desyres—Amen. Writyn in haste penultimo die Aprilis by your olde louyer and bedman'.

"DAVID, Prior of Plympton'."

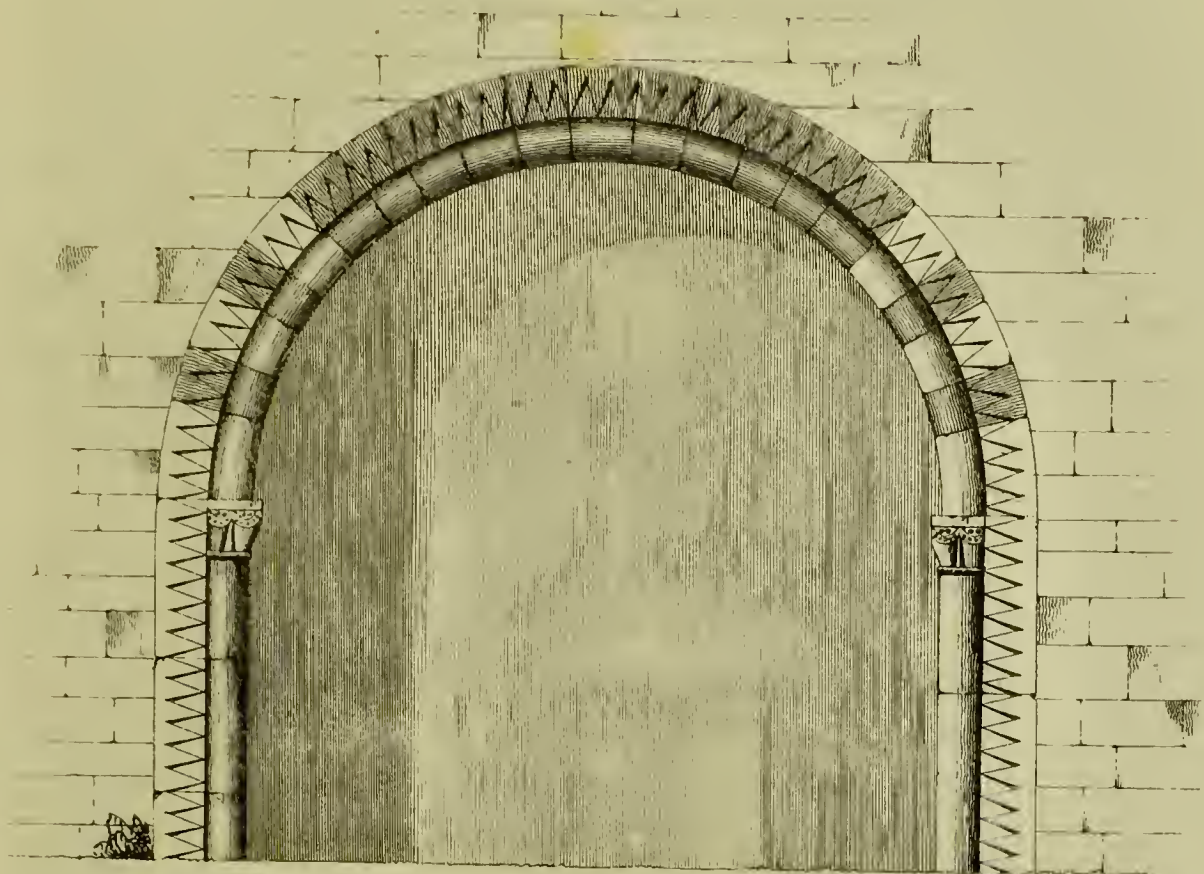
monastery gates, never again to re-enter them,—when, with their “occupation gone” (like the stage coachmen and guards of the 19th century), they would be lost in the crowd of a bustling world, and never seen or heard of more. There was a dark side to the picture which England then presented; and perhaps the saddest sight was, when, on the morrow after the dissolution, the mendicant knocked at the almonry door, knowing no change, and least of all in charity, and for the first time found no bread or alms for him.

The priory remains, though little known, are of considerable interest. Besides the Norman cellar, and the Early English refectory over, there are some scattered remains of the chapel and cloisters. The cellar is sixty-one feet six inches by fourteen feet within, stone-arched, and lighted on the south side by four small semi-circular-headed windows. The masonry is of great thickness; and on the north side and east end, in the width of the wall, is a passage two feet six inches wide, which probably was nothing more than a dry area, though the common notion is that it is the commencement of a subterranean way (now blocked up) leading to the castle, about a quarter of a mile distant. The original entrance to the cellar was by a fine Norman doorway on the south side. It was only after diligent search that I found it, encased with many coats of plaster. There are engaged shafts on each side, and the chevron ornament is carried round the jambs as well as the arch, which latter is formed of alternate voussoirs of grey and green stone.

Above the cellar is the almost perfect outline of the refectory, with its original fire-place, windows and roof, all of an Early English character. The kitchen, a detached building of the fifteenth century, situated to the east of the refectory, remains in a tolerably perfect state, and the position of the old priory mill is indicated by a modern structure erected about thirty years ago.

Adjoining the mill is the priory orchard, said to be the oldest in England.

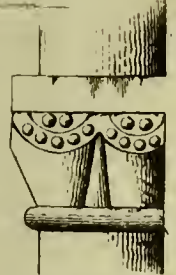
LYMPTON PRIORY



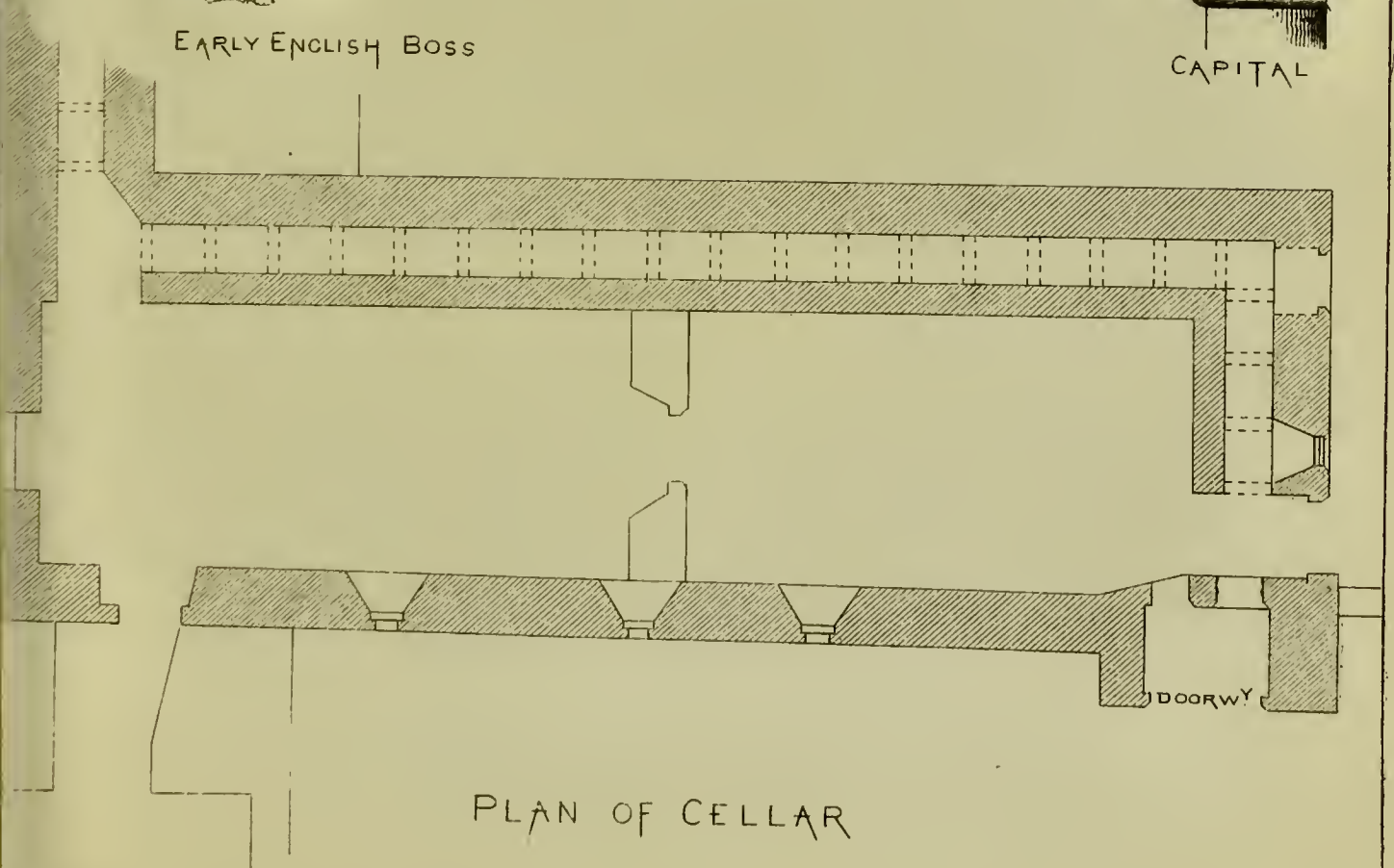
DOORWAY



EARLY ENGLISH BOSS



CAPITAL



PLAN OF CELLAR

At some distance to the north-west of the domestic buildings were the chapel and cloisters, of which some vestiges remain in their original positions, but around them modern walls and hedges have been formed. The bases of a doorway, deeply recessed, having four detached shafts on each side, and beautifully moulded, lead to the supposition that the Priory as a whole was a most important architectural work. I also found several scattered fragments of Early English foliage. No doubt many interesting objects lie buried in the priory lands, and possibly even the tombs of the two bishops Warelwast.

In the Norman and Early English and Decorated work about here, we find that granite was never used, although to be obtained in the immediate locality.* It was probably rejected, not merely because it was hard to work, but on account of its cold and colourless appearance; thus, in the Priory and in the most ancient portions of the two churches, *i.e.* the chancels, you will find no dressings or moulded work in that material, but in the beautiful and durable green slate-stone from S. Germans or Boringdon, and in Caen stone; and to give still more artistic effect to their buildings, they used sparingly a close red sandstone, obtained from a distance. There are some rather old looking houses in Plympton, which are said to be built entirely of stone from the priory, and in one front in particular may be observed this beautiful masonry of the thirteenth century, in green and red, arranged almost like a draught board.

The Perpendicular builders were, not as a rule, remarkable for artistic feeling. They saw beauty in size, uniformity, and in the endless repetition of a stereotyped panel; and one can imagine archæologists of the fifteenth century regarding contemporary architects, much as we look upon the designers of the glass and iron palaces of the present day. The greater part of the churches of Plympton S. Mary and Plympton S. Maurice are Perpendicular,

* This also applies to the Cornish churches.

and built of granite, in large blocks, and there is not that sharp and elegant detail in this as in the earlier work.

S. Mary's is a pretty and picturesque church now ; but it was probably more than two hundred years before the granite began to tone down, and the ivy and lichen to cling to it,—neither as a rule “take kindly,” as the saying is in Devonshire, to granite.

The limits of this paper will not allow of my giving anything like a detailed description of Plympton S. Mary Church. Full justice has already been done this edifice by the late Rev. W. I. Coppard, who was largely instrumental in its being restored. The Early Decorated chancel—with its fine east window, and elaborate sedilia and piscina—is one of the best specimens of the period in the county. Not the least interesting part of the church is the south porch and parvise over, which the late Mr. H. H. Treby took most commendable pains to restore. The groining of the porch is admirable, though in the re-dressing and chiseling of the ribs and bosses, the original character of the work has been partially impaired. In restorations, much is lost through the desire to see things look fresh and new.

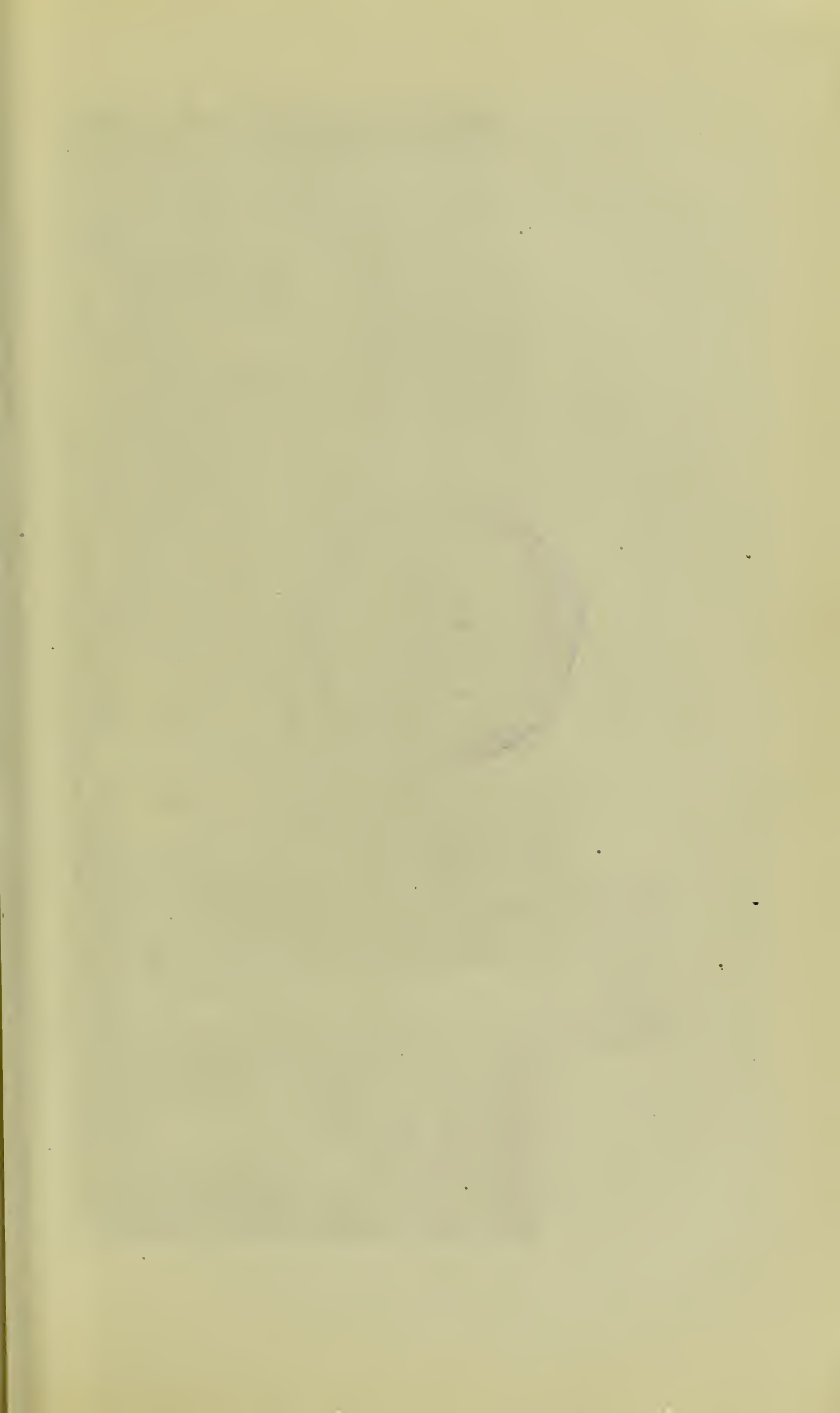
In the Strode, or S. Catherine chapel, is the monument of Sir William Strode, with the effigies of the knight and his two wives :—

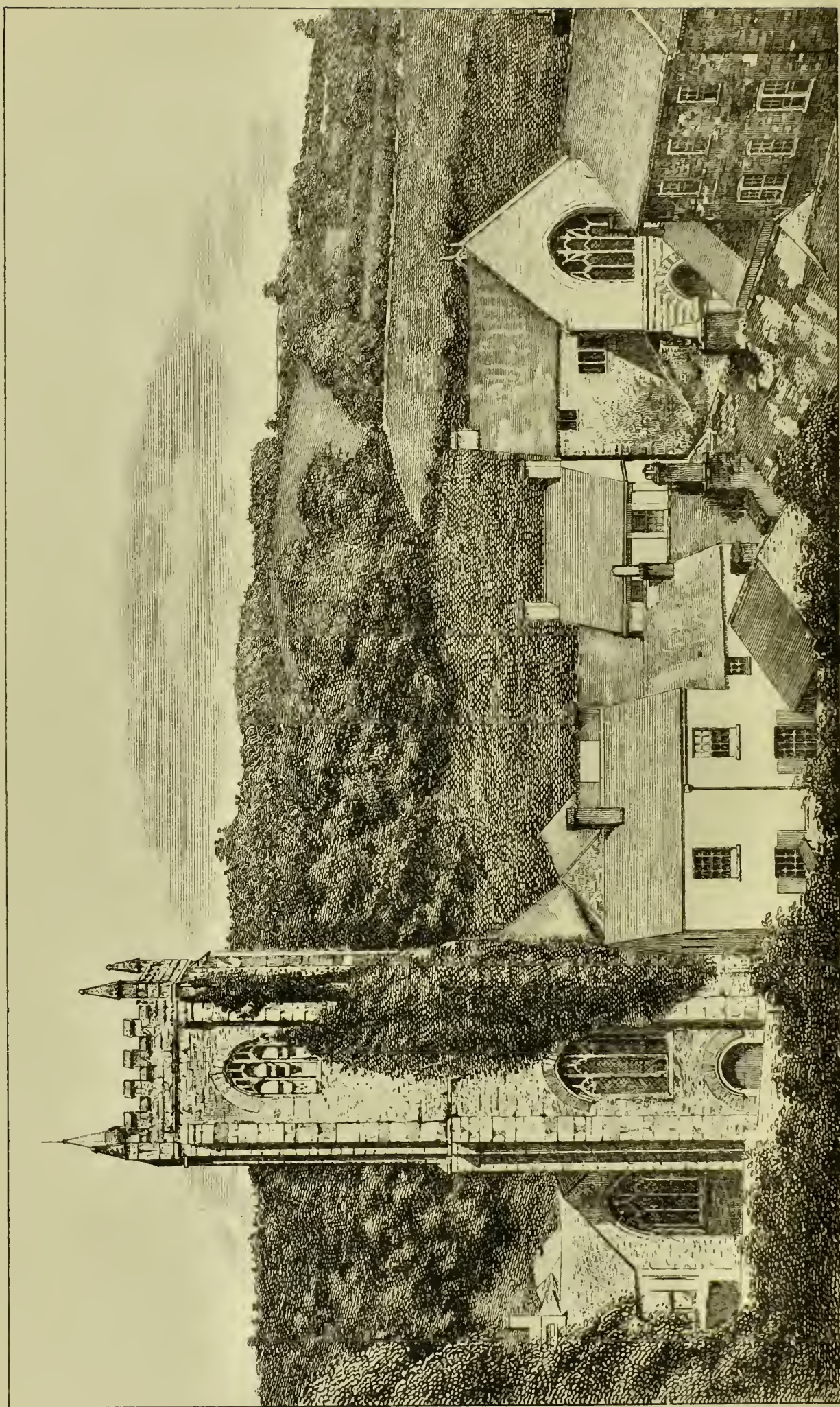
“ Mary, incarnate virtue, soul and skin
Both pure, whom death nor life convinced of sin,
Had daughters like 7 Pleiades, but she
Was a prime star of greatest charity.”

And over the knight,—

“ Treade soft, for if you wake this knight alone,
You raise an host, religion's champion,
His country's staff, right bold distributor,
His neighbour's guard, the poor man's almoner,
Who dies with works about him as he did,
Shall rise attended most triumphantly.”

The Town Church of Plympton, originally dedicated to Thomas à Becket, but, when rebuilt in the 15th century, to S. Maurice,





PLYMPTON CHVRCH AND SCHOOL

consists of a nave, north and south aisles, and a fine tower at the west end, in the Perpendicular style of the 15th century, and a chancel, as at S. Mary's, of an earlier date, having an interesting sedilia and good decorated window at the east end—speaking of the masonry and not of the glass, which is extremely bad. The south porch has a vaulted roof and parvise over, as at the other church.

Much has been done of late years towards improving this parish church, but its internal effect is entirely marred by the unsightly plastered roof of the nave, and the close pews or pens. The nave-roof, I find by reference to the vestry book, was reconstructed in the year 1752, after the model of the new roof in Stoke Damerel Church, then recently put up. That was the dark age of English taste. How very dark may be imagined from this plagiarism.

There are memorial windows in this church to members of the Treby family, and monuments to the Rev. Samuel Reynolds, Admiral Cotton, and other local celebrities. The following epitaph is the most curious :—

“ Saml. Snelling, Gent.
Twice Maior of this
town. he died the 20
Day of Nov. 1624.

“ The man whose body
That here doth lye
Beganne to live
When he did dye.

“ Good faith in life
And death he proved,
And was of God
And man belov'd ;
Now he liveth
In Heaven's joy,
And never more
To feel annoy.”

The shaft of a large granite cross, probably the market cross,

was discovered about four years ago embedded in a wall of the Guildhall, taken down in the course of some alterations. It now lies desecrated, under a heap of stones; but it is satisfactory to know that its restoration is in contemplation.

In the register of this parish are some curious entries; thus, there is record of a plague which carried off a great number of the inhabitants; and on one occasion forty marriages are said to have taken place in one day, by proclamation, at the Market Cross. This was during the Commonwealth, when the religious ceremony was ignored, and against the entry some stout royalist or disappointed bachelor has written, "This was the hour and power of darkness."

We have yet to touch on the politics of the town.

Plympton became a borough town, with the privileges of a market and fairs, by a charter from Baldwin de Redvers, Earl of Devon, dated March the 25th, 1241. The borough sent members to Parliament as early as the 23rd year of Edward the First's reign, and continued to do so until disfranchised in 1832. It was a very respectable constituency of nearly a hundred free burgesses, who were sworn in by the corporation, which consisted of a mayor, recorder, and eight aldermen, called the Common Council.

The Strode influence was great in the town from a very early time, and several members of that family sat in Parliament for Plympton. In Elizabeth's reign, Sir John Hele, a distinguished lawyer, and at one time King's Sergeant, was returned for the borough. A little later Sir Francis Drake, nephew of the great Sir Francis, and successor to the baronetcy, became member. In Charles the First's reign, Sir William Strode, one of the most distinguished of the great party which then resisted the undue authority of the Crown, and who, with three other members, was committed to the tower by the King, sat in Parliament for Plympton. Another famous member for Plympton was Sir Nicholas Slanning, a staunch Royalist, who distinguished himself, especially,

as a brave soldier in the siege of Bristol. Then we have the memorable names of Sir George Treby (ancestor of the late Mr. H. H. Treby), and Sir John Maynard, and at quite a late period in the history of this borough, Lord Castlereagh represented it in Parliament.

In an interesting address delivered by the last recorder of the town, Mr. Deeble Boger, on the occasion of the corporation resigning their functions in 1859, it was stated that the borough was "what was called a nomination borough, that is, those two families who had the greatest number of friends, and to whom, from the period of the revolution, the gratitude of the borough was justly due,—the Trebys, in whom great interest naturally centred, and the Edgcumbes, who were connected with the borough in the same way,—possessed the power of nominating a member, and this nomination consisted in their recommending him for election. This power was subject to one limitation, that the person recommended should be of the same politics as the electors."

Perhaps the greatest representative the borough ever had was Sir Christopher Wren. It was in May, 1685, that this distinguished architect was elected member of parliament for Plympton. How this came to pass, and which of the two great parties he represented, we are not precisely informed, but may easily conjecture, as Plympton was always a Tory borough. No doubt he occasionally thought, though he might not say, with Mercutio, "a plague on both your houses," for men of science and artists—and he was in a high degree an artist—are seldom very ardent politicians. Still we know he was a staunch royalist and churchman. His father was dean of Windsor; his uncle, the Bishop of Ely, had been imprisoned in the tower for nearly twenty years during the Commonwealth; he himself was a Fellow of All Souls, Oxford, and held a professorship at that University, at an extremely orthodox period. There are other reasons for supposing that he stuck pretty close to the court and government of the day. His

father being dean, and Sir Christopher himself having only the year before been appointed comptroller of the works at Windsor, we may readily imagine that he came down to the independent electors of Plympton with a rather strong recommendation from the Dean and Chapter, who were, as they are still, the patrons of the living in this borough. And when he came (always supposing that he did come, and that he did not merely send his respects from London, like the late Premier to his kind friends at Tiverton), he was no doubt well entertained by the gentlemen of his party in the town, and lustily cheered by the agricultural non-electors, who always exhibited a great deal of enthusiasm under the stimulating influence of an election, and were never heard again to express their sentiments until the next parliament brought down a new member for the eyes of all Plympton—not to say “all Europe”—to gaze upon. Many of the inhabitants, however, who were acquainted with Sir Christopher's fame, may be supposed to have regarded their representative with admiration and pride. Just nineteen years before, the terrible Fire had devastated the metropolis, and now London was rising like a phoenix from the ashes by his magic wand. Exactly ten years ago he had himself laid the foundation stone of S. Paul's Cathedral, and now the first stage of that great work had been just completed, the choir and its side aisles, and critics, who remembered Old S. Paul's in its Gothic glory, and had seen Inigo Jones defacing and tinkering the venerable fane with his Palladian porticos and urns, were flocking to the churchyard. The new structure was already too grand and unique not to be commended; but there was yet a quarter of a century's laborious and incessant work before the top stone could be raised, and the gilded cross could crown the noble dome. The same architect, the same master-builder, and the same bishop, who witnessed the beginning of the great work in 1675, saw its close in 1710.

Sir Christopher Wren, the member for Plympton, was probably

OLD HOUSES AT PLYMPTON



RIDGE TILE



T. L. WOOD DEL ET SC



DETAILS OF ORNAMENTAL SLATING

the first architect ever returned to the House of Commons. There have been several since then, and their presence in parliament has no doubt tended to advance public taste, and to further many great and important national works.

The Guildhall was built or rather restored in 1696, some years after Sir Christopher Wren represented the town, and it may be safely asserted that he had no hand in designing the present elevation, because, quaint and picturesque though it is, his style is nowhere stamped on it. It is however said (with what truth I cannot say) that he was the architect of Plympton House, a large and substantial mansion, with a façade of Portland stone, erected in the reign of Queen Anne for Mr. Commissioner Ourry, of Plymouth Dockyard. It is a plain but costly building, in the then newly adopted style, with a certain French character about it. The large and broad barred sash windows, with their weights and pulleys, which were novelties at that time, must have greatly puzzled Snug the joiner of Plympton, who had been accustomed all his days to the old English casements.

The Guildhall has more of the mediæval character about it, with its pillars and arches and covered way, like the Chester Rows, and probably it was intended to have some resemblance to the Guildhall in the county town, a humble but by no means unsuccessful imitation. Thus we follow suit in buildings as in everything else, though the architecture of our towns would no doubt be more entertaining if we oftener aimed at originality, and played a card of our own occasionally.*

* Over the Guildhall are the arms, carved in stone, of Sir Thomas Trevor, Knight, and Sir George Treby, Knight. Members of the Treby family were often connected with the corporation of the borough. In 1755 the parishioners at a vestry then held passed a resolution concerning the ringing of the church bells, "George Treby, Esq., and the other gentlemen belonging to the corporation," being respectfully included in the said resolution.

"Agreed on Easter Monday, March the 31st day, 1755, by us whose names are hereunto subscribed, being the Parishioners then present at the Vestry then held. That only five persons shall, and are by the authority of the said Vestry allowed to ring the

Speaking of cards reminds me that in the same street with the Guildhall are some curious old slated fronts, in which the slates have been cut in the shapes of clubs, spades, hearts, and diamonds. Under these fronts we have also the covered way.

We now come to a building a little to the south-east of the church, around which so many treasured associations cluster, that we hardly know whether we have yet said adieu to the sacred edifices of Plympton. The old Grammar School is the most venerable and interesting school of art in all England. Here the greatest English painter—a man for “all time”—learnt the first principles of drawing. The house in which he was born overlooks his school-room and his play-ground. Here too Northcote, his clever and eccentric pupil, acquired his, perhaps not very classic education. This also was the first school of the late distinguished President of the Royal Academy, Sir Charles Eastlake, and the *Alma Mater* of poor Benjamin Haydon. A mournful interest indeed attaches to the building as connected with the last-mentioned name. The year before he died Haydon visited the old Grammar School, and wrote his name in pencil on the wall where you may still see it.

“B. R. Haydon,
Historical Painter, London,
Educated here 1801.
Rev. W. Haines. (Master)
Head boy then.”

Bells of this Parish for the future, and that they shall ring only on such public days as the Parishioners shall from time to time agree to and approve of, and that the said five persons that shall undertake to Ring shall be obliged likewise to chime the Bells on every Sunday in the forenoon and the afternoon, at the proper Season for Divine Service, and that they shall be obliged to give their due and regular attendance, both in the fore and afternoon of every Sunday upon the Service of the church, and that they be at Liberty to ring for George Treby, Esq., and the other Gentlemen belonging to the Corporation, as often as the said Gentlemen shall signify it to be their pleasure to have the Bells rung, and that the said Ringers are never to ring after *Eight* of the clock in the Evening, or before Seven in the morning.”

“*The Ringers are never to ring after Eight.*” Thus are old customs and traditions handed down from age to age.

“The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day.”



✕ THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL CLOISTER ✕

J. E. WOODS

This was only a few months before a dark and impenetrable cloud shrouded the clear intellect of this gifted man, and his life—so useful, but so ill-requited—closed in saddest gloom.

The key-stone of the doorway under the cloister gives the date of the building as 1664. Strange to say it is a Gothic structure of the most picturesque design and arrangement. At the time it was built, architecture had been given over almost entirely to the Renaissance and Italian Schools. It is singular, therefore, to find here at Plympton an unconventional style adopted at such a time, but it has been suggested that the same eccentric architect who designed the fine Gothic church of Charles in Plymouth in the middle of the 17th century, built also the Grammar School in the neighbouring town, and the points of resemblance are certainly very great. We have the same evidence of the desire to do something good and true in both, the same good outline and arrangement of parts, and the same superadded faults in little details, as though the designer himself knew what he was about, but could not bring his workmen up to the mark. No wonder little Reynolds saw something to admire in the outline and shadows of the cloister, for nothing can be better than the proportions of the pillars and arches, and the banding of the masonry over in alternate courses about six inches high, of granite and dark limestone. In fact, the lower portion of the building is the most pleasing piece of masonry in this neighbourhood; and though the large square-headed windows over are not so good, yet the angle of the roof is excellent, and the large perpendicular windows at the ends not without merit. The school-room is about sixty-three feet long by twenty-six feet in width, the master's desk at one end, and on each side of the window (over) a rudely painted shield with the armorial bearings of Hele and Maynard. Overhanging the entrance on one side is a small gallery, approached from a chamber probably once used as a class or flogging room, but now too dilapidated for either practical purpose, and much in keeping with the rest of

the building, which is rather out at elbows. In fact—what with the Castle, Priory, and Grammar School—the description which the American gave of Rome, will apply to Plympton—“*Quite a nice place, but the public buildings very much out of repair.*” The Master’s house adjoins the school-room, and here the great painter was born. The front appears to be comparatively modern, but the bedroom in which he is said to have first seen the light is in the back and older part of the house, with a window overlooking the school and play-ground as before mentioned. Some rough sketches, drawn by Reynolds in his youth, were to be seen on the walls of this room when Haydon and Wilkie visited the house in 1809, but have since been obliterated by some barbarous whitewasher. The engraving represents the cloisters of the Grammar School, the subject of almost the first drawing Reynolds ever made.

Sir Joshua Reynolds was born on the 16th July, 1723, and was baptized on the 30th of the same month, when by mistake his name was entered in the register as Joseph.

It is unnecessary here to give anything like a sketch of the great painter’s career, but one or two incidents connected with the place of his birth (to which throughout his life he was strongly attached) may be mentioned. He regarded with the greatest satisfaction and pleasure his visit to Devonshire with Dr. Johnson in 1762. It was on this occasion that Northcote first saw his great master. It seems that Sir Joshua went to Plymouth Dock, in company with the Doctor, on a certain day when there was a great commotion in reference to some local matter, probably the water question. “I remember,” says Northcote, “when he was pointed out to me at a public meeting, where a great crowd was assembled, I got as near to him as I could from the pressure of the people, to touch the skirt of his coat, which I did with great satisfaction to my mind.”

In 1772 Sir Joshua was elected to the Aldermanic gown of

Plympton, Lord Mount Edgumbe acquainting him by letter of the circumstance. The letter in which he acknowledges the honour, with most hearty thanks, is in the Cottonian Museum at Plymouth. In the following year he was chosen Mayor of the borough, and he declared that this circumstance gave him more gratification than any other honour which he had received during his life; and this sentiment he expressed when it was rather out of place, as the following circumstance related by Northcote will shew. Reynolds had built for his recreation on Richmond Hill a villa, of which Sir William Chambers was architect, and in the summer season it was the frequent custom of Sir Joshua to dine at this place with select parties of his friends. "It happened some little time before he was to be elected Mayor of Plympton, that, one day, after dining at the house, himself and his party took an evening walk in Richmond Gardens, when, very unexpectedly, at a turning of one of the avenues, they suddenly met the King, accompanied by a part of the Royal Family; and when, as his Majesty saw him, it was impossible for him to withdraw without being noticed. The King called to him, and immediately entered into conversation, and told him that he had been informed of the office that he was soon to be invested with, that of being made the Mayor of his native town of Plympton. Sir Joshua was astonished that so minute and inconsiderable a circumstance, which was of importance only to himself, should have come so quickly to the knowledge of the King; but he assured his Majesty of its truth, saying it was an honour which gave him more pleasure than any other he had ever received in his life; and then, luckily recollecting himself, added, 'except that which your Majesty was graciously pleased to bestow upon me,' alluding to his knighthood."

On the occasion of his being elected Mayor, he presented to his much-loved native town his own portrait, painted, as it seems, expressly to commemorate the occasion. It was placed in the Corporation dining-room, but sold by the Common Council for

£150., when the town was disfranchised ! That *this* was “ the hour and power of darkness ” there cannot be a doubt.

Sir Joshua Reynolds died on the 23rd February, 1792, and was interred in the crypt of S. Paul's Cathedral with every honour that could be shewn to worth and genius. His tomb, adorned by one of Flaxman's best works, is almost close to that of Sir Christopher Wren ;—England's greatest Painter we may almost say without any qualification, and England's greatest Architect ; each during some portion of life connected with this honoured little town of Plympton, though by different ties and at different periods of its history ; both resting from their labours in the great temple which Wren built, and which Reynolds sought to adorn with his matchless pencil.

The great honour which belongs to Plympton deserves to be held in lasting remembrance, not merely by every inhabitant of that town, but by all in this neighbourhood who have any appreciation of art or desire for its advancement.

NOTE.—The authorities for the historical facts in this paper are Dr. Oliver, Rev. S. Rowe, and Mr. Cotton. I am indebted to Mr. Deeble Boger, of Wolsden, for the drawing of the Plympton Seals from which the engraving is taken.

